

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

NO. 4, 1943

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VOL 4 NO. 4

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY FILM CENTRE 34 SOHO SQUARE LONDON W1

SIXPENCE

AS OTHERS SEE US

"WHAT sort of people do they think we are," Mr. Churchill once asked. He was talking about our enemies but it is a question we might well ask ourselves about our friends. We know what sort of people we are but if people in other countries have different ideas we have only ourselves to blame. And if, as is even more probable, they haven't the faintest idea what we are like, so much the worse for us in the long run.

For many years now the British Council has been one of the chief organisations entrusted with the job of selling Britain abroad. To further this end they have a department which supervises the making of films to draw attention to British ideals and achievements as well as to British products. Their films are shown all over the Empire and also in neutral countries. Direct war propaganda is not their job but propaganda for the indestructible qualities of Britain is presumably their aim. This means that they must evoke interest in the British way of life and present a background picture which will arouse a sympathetic and fellow-feeling for us in foreign minds.

Now this is an important job because it builds for the future. After a war, good feelings between nations are seldom very evident and yet there is never a time when good feelings are more needed. Therefore any work which helps create international understanding is of vital importance.

Recently the British Council showed a programme of films. Since they showed them to the Press one supposes that these films were their latest and best. This programme was part of their picture of Britain and a picture presumably intended to make people abroad have good instead of bad thoughts about us. There were five films and their titles were *The Royal Mile*, *St. Pauls*, *London 1942*, *Little Ships*, *Power on the Land*. Now let us look at this picture of us and our country which is being built up with great care and expense to show to our potential friends in the Argentine, Sweden, Spain and other countries.

The Royal Mile is a film about Edinburgh, or rather about that part of it which lies between Holyrood Palace and Edinburgh Castle. This film tells nobody anything except that there are quite a lot of Allied soldiers in that city. There are to be sure, many references to Mary, Queen of Scots, but the historical side of the film is so garbled that it is practically impossible to know or care what it is all about. Part of the commentary is spoken as if by a guide, and anybody who has memories of visiting any monument with one of these masters of monotonous patter will know exactly how packed with irrelevancies the whole film is.

The next film brings us to London, to another monument, and really the journey wasn't necessary. For we arrive at St. Paul's

and although this is admittedly a noble edifice, it is difficult to see just what emotion it is intended to evoke in the foreign mind. Once again we are treated to some potted history, are shown a few tombs and have a quick look round the interior. Then comes the great fire raid and we see St. Paul's amidst the flaming city. The film whisks us to Fleet Street on the morning after the raid to see the papers pouring out of the presses and we are told, complacently, that a sigh of relief ran round the world when the people read the news that St. Paul's was saved. We are sure that everyone was very glad that St. Paul's was not destroyed but the world had other things to think about at that time.

London 1942, the next film, came nearest to presenting any sort of picture that we should ever want to look at. It has already been reviewed in this paper and although it didn't say anything very much, it did show a picture of which one could say that this is what London looked like in 1942.

Little Ships started off with a lot of nonsense about the sun rising and looking at the same scene that it had for the last three hundred years.

It was all about those old craftsmen who build wooden boats. Admittedly the film ended with the rescue of a British airman by one of the launches they build? but there was a strong feeling of nostalgia for the Armada all the way through.

Power on the Land was a surprise ending to a regrettably unsurprising programme. It consisted of a series of Technicolor shots of modern agricultural machines and it did succeed in suggesting some of the progress which is taking place in British agriculture.

Although they were all competently shot, only one of the films can be said to have been made with any feeling that people were going to sit and look and listen. They lacked all sense of persuasion and had the same impact as if bundles of picture postcards had been flung at our heads. Their total message seemed to be that we have some historic buildings, that things look pretty much as they have done for several hundred years and that everybody ought to be jolly well interested because this is Britain. And yet one could make films which would show the very real importance of St. Pauls as a symbol, the emotional significance of Edinburgh and the importance of a tradition of craftsmanship to any country which makes anything at all. In fact one could make films about Britain.

Thoughts of St. Peter's, Rome, do not make us feel any better about Italy to-day neither does the fact that the Germans are brilliant makers of children's toys cause us to shed a sympathetic tear. People are a country's real ambassadors, people and ideas. We submit this thought to the British Council, whose films the other day showed neither.

FILMS FOR RE-OCCUPIED EUROPE

WHEN the day comes for the victorious Allies to march into Europe they will uncover as they go many new problems of propaganda and civic instruction. It has long been obvious that the film will have a special and a vital part to play in bringing back political sanity and economic stability to the freed lands. It can help in the problem of physical reconstruction, the task of feeding, clothing and rehousing millions of people; but even more important, if men are to go forward with hope in their hearts, is the need to show that a new spirit has come to Europe. The contribution of the film, therefore, can be two-fold, covering both physical and spiritual needs. In the first category will come films indicating the techniques of agriculture, food distribution, public hygiene, housing, etc., which are most appropriate to each re-occupied country. In the second category will come films to show what form of government it is proposed immediately to set up, what are the ideals of this government and what future is visualised for the country concerned, for the continent of Europe and for the world as a whole.

Some of the films in the first, the instructional, category are already in existence in this country and all that is needed is the preparation of foreign language versions. This is especially true of agricultural films. Some of those recently made in this country for the instruction of farm workers may show methods unsuitable for use overseas, but there are many suitable for export. A specially prepared series of agricultural films will, however, be needed to show how food shortages may be reduced by growing new crops appropriate to special local problems of nutrition. We have a few films on public health of which useful foreign versions could be made and circulated, but the number is woefully small. It is not too early to be making a series of films which will show how best to tackle coming continental problems of malnutrition and actual starvation. There must be films to show the medical profession and the general public how to face the increasing incidence of deficiency and nervous diseases; how to restore water supply and sanitation in devastated areas; how to carry out temporary housing schemes in devastated areas, employing whatever labour and materials may be available; how to compensate with temporary first-aid measures for an insufficient supply of doctors in areas where casualties are high or disease rife.

There are many more subjects for instructional films but those listed above indicate basic needs. Depending on circumstances and the country concerned there will be many special needs to be met at short notice. Film production machinery must therefore be flexible and speedy so that it can adjust itself to whatever conditions may be found. It must make use, wherever possible, of local technicians and equipment.

Assess Public Mood

This instructional side of the film's job is much more simple and straightforward than the propaganda side. In propaganda we are concerned not only with what films should be shown but how to show them. It would, for example, be unwise to flood the cinemas of a re-occupied country with direct propaganda films as soon as the Allied armies take over. It will be necessary carefully to assess public mood and not to assume that cinematic demonstrations of allied power or prescience will necessarily be popular. It is almost certain that the first instinct of a free people will be to relax. Whatever their political views they will be little interested in whether or not the Allies are brave, wise or human. They will in fact be most likely to believe in our good will if we come bearing lighter and more frivolous gifts. A wise policy would be to bring back to the screens of re-occupied and ex-enemy countries those Hollywood stars whom they will not have seen for so long. Bing Crosby and Gary Cooper are likely to provide a warmer and more welcome approach to sanity than a documentary dissertation on the Atlantic

Charter. With feature films (not necessarily new ones) the backbone of the new democratic programmes can be built. During this phase we shall be trying to create basic goodwill. And let us not assume that we shall everywhere find goodwill without working for it. It would be fatal to forget that not all the peoples we are to free from bondage will immediately prove anti-fascist—in the enemy countries we should be prepared to find ourselves faced, even after the war is won, by a pro-fascist majority. Such an anticipation may happily prove unjustified but it will be short-sighted not to prepare to meet it. Even the anti-fascists coming under our Allied control will not necessarily be pro-British or pro-American. They may be one or the other or neither. To our own eyes the crusading sword we bear may be a glittering weapon of pure virtue, but there will be many potential allies who will not have forgotten that Britain and the United States have in the past been associated with selfish imperialistic policies and who will remember the Anglo-Saxon political morality of pre-war years. We must never forget that behind us lies the policy of non-intervention in Spain, the Munich betrayal of Czechoslovakia and the earlier abandonments of Abyssinia and China. Moreover, some of the statesmen responsible for these policies still hold high office under the British Government and may even continue to do so when we sweep triumphantly across Europe. In these circumstances, dare we hope that our good intentions will be taken at once for granted?

A Purge of Leadership

It may well be that without a purge of Allied leadership our propaganda in re-occupied Europe is, in any case, doomed to failure. We have only to look at North Africa to see that reactionary policies can lead to bitter cynicism not only in the re-occupied territory but in the Allied countries as well. Propagandists working for the reconstruction of Europe will find themselves faced with a well-nigh impossible task if the North African mistake is repeated.

If, however, a propaganda job is to be done behind the advancing Allied armies then we dare not wait to see what the political situation will be at the time of victory. Films must be planned, and indeed made now, and all we can do is to assume that the work of the propagandists will not be hopelessly handicapped by the machinations of diehard diplomatists.

Clearly, films of fighting must be avoided. We must look forward not back, avoiding any temptation to present to continental audiences military triumphs of the preceding months which may seem to contrast with their own forced inactivity. Nor must we remind them that they owe their salvation to Allied military might. Gratitude is an emotion on which we will rebuild Europe at our peril. Our films must look forward to dignity and decency in the future rather than back to any version of the fable of St. George and the Dragon. If we have won the war our military power and sagacity will be taken for granted but the question of whether we possess the power and sagacity necessary to rebuild civilisation will still remain to be proved. Let us therefore make sure that we send to Europe a series of lively, warm, unpretentious films which show what we are doing in Britain and America about building, not simply the physical structure which the war has shattered, but a new conception of human relationships. Let us have films of people getting together to plan and carry out undertakings for themselves. Let us show with films of works committees and other democratic organisations that the spirit of eager initiative is still alive in the democracies, hoping that from our example a similar spirit may be re-born in countries too long subordinated to the Nazi jackboot. Let us show that even during the war the British people were looking forward to a better post-war world—not simply a better post-war Britain; that victory was foreseen as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Show that there was a time in Britain when the people were as interested in the Beveridge Report as in the war news. Let all these films present their arguments in terms of ordinary people living and working in a community which they are themselves shaping. It will be clear that the people of Britain are not very different from those of other countries and this is the surest foundation on which to build post-war co-operation.

In addition to these films of the new spirit we must have something specific to say about the material shape of post-war organisation. Here the propagandist is in the hands of the statesmen. Unless the Century of the Common Man has become a real thing in our minds on the day of victory we have no message for Europe that amounts to more than a jumble of platitudes. At that time it will become clear whether the war was indeed worth winning. Re-occupied Europe will become the touchstone by which we will be able to tell whether our post-war aims are shadow or substance.

It is true that even without films dealing with fundamental political principles in the post-war world we can nevertheless show the peoples what form of civil and international machinery there

is to be and who is to operate it. Such films must be made in any case, but unless they are backed by films of fundamental principles they will be merely *ad hoc* and of no permanent consequence.

All that has gone before has been written on the assumption that the United Nations will be moving forward side by side with a commonly agreed policy for Europe. It must be recognised that at present no adequate agreement is within sight of achievement. If at the end of the war the Allies are following separate lines of policy then inevitably and disastrously each will make its own propaganda in the countries which it can seize and place under its own domination. Should this situation arise the task of any honest propagandist will necessarily be to work towards a conformity of principle between the Allies. Whether he will command sufficient strength to do so remains to be seen. Clearly it is the propagandist's vital task to strive towards unity of policy now while post-war plans are being made, conscious that the alternative will be to find himself on the day of victory concerned with the parochial differences of Giraud and de Gaulle, Molotoff and Cordell Hull, Chiang Kai Shek and Eden. And then the problem will be one, not of post-war propaganda, but of propaganda between this war and the next.

NOTES OF THE MONTH

The Films Division and the Industry

IN THE cinemas we have lately observed what looks suspiciously like competition between the Films Division of the Ministry of Information and the commercial end of the industry. It may be only by chance that *Nine Men* from Ealing and the official Libyan film *Desert Victory* arrived on the screen within a couple of weeks of each other; it may be by chance too, that *Fires Were Started* from Crown and *The Bells Go Down* from Ealing (both about the A.F.S. in the blitz) are pre-released in the West End no more than a fortnight apart; but when one hears rumours of an official submarine picture racing for completion neck and neck with a commercial film on the same subject, the innocent observer may be forgiven for wondering if design as well as accident may not be at work. There are, of course, a number of possible explanations; but even if a production overlap is unavoidable—and frankly we do not see why it need be—surely when two feature films have been made on the same subject it should be a fairly simple matter to arrange that an interval elapse between the dates of their release. It is not simply a matter of commercial advantage and disadvantage. We are not concerned with whether overlapping at the box-office means decreased revenue for either party. A much more serious matter is the fortuitous distortion of propaganda emphases which may be caused by the plugging of one particular aspect of the war effort at the inevitable expense of others. It is obviously wrong if the public is suddenly made 100 per cent "A.F.S.-conscious" for no better reason than that two films about fire-fighting happen to have been completed at the same time.

We suspect that the trouble, like most of our propaganda troubles, is due to a reluctance on the part of the M.O.I. to impose any kind of plan. Officialdom's affection for the ideals of nineteenth century *laissez-faire* sometimes appears to tempt it to indulge in a little commercial competition of its own. Can it be that some official in the Films Division gets a certain sly satisfaction from beating commercial producers on the distribution post? If so it reveals a complete misconception of the duties and functions of the Films Division. The Director of the Films Division should be above the commercial battle. It is for him to see that overlaps do not occur, certainly not to be the cause of them. Has any attempt been made to consult with the industry on the production and distribution of propaganda films so that complete co-ordination of official and commercial production and distribution can be arranged? Is there any reason to suppose that the industry would be unwilling to co-operate in such planning? It is surely in everyone's

interests that production and distribution should not be chaotic and it is certainly the job of the M.O.I. to see that the stream of propaganda, from whatever source, is regulated and flows smoothly and evenly into the right channels.

Look at the British Empire

CANADA, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia and India have all accepted the necessity of using the film as a method of telling the world about themselves and their war effort. Films or film material are received from all these countries but some of them lag behind the others in their appreciation of the necessity for the quality of the film to be good. Films cost money and manpower, films are considered an important propaganda weapon. To make a first class cameraman out of a beginner takes years; but to make a beginner into a competent shooter does not take more than a matter of months. If he has been a still cameraman before, the process is even quicker. It ought to be possible for Britain and America to invite a number of the war film-makers of the Empire to visit them for a concentrated course in practical cinematography. The benefits of such a scheme would be out of all proportion to the time and trouble necessary to put it into action. It could be done on an exchange basis so that no gaps in production need be caused. It may sound as though such an idea would be too difficult to carry out in the middle of a war. This is not necessarily true. It's surprising the number of people who manage to get about, many of them, not least some financial Tycoons of the movie world, without any good reason.

It'll be all right on the night

It will read better when we have a fuller treatment
The shooting script will smooth *that* over
It will look different when you *see* it on the screen
We can cut away from *that*
A montage sequence will make *all* the difference
But wait till you hear it with the *music*
It will look better when it's cut *down*
The opticals will smooth *that* out
There's nothing like a show copy for really *judging* a film
Wait till you see it in a *proper* cinema
It's not really the sort of film the critics *ever* like
We didn't make it for the *West End*
Well anyway its *bound* to make its cost nowadays
After all, old man, the treatment was pretty stinking, wasn't it?

FILM OF THE MONTH

"Fires Were Started"

Fires Were Started Production: Crown. Direction: Humphrey Jennings. Camera: C. Pennington-Richards. Sets: Edward Carrick. Music: William Alwyn. One hour. M.O.I.

Who would have thought that a film about the blitz could seem timely and important now? It is the great achievement of *Fires Were Started* that you're just as interested and the film means just as much now as if it had been made and shown in the middle of the raids; and it will mean just as much in a few years' time when the war is over. And this makes it, with the original *Merchant Seamen*, the best of the Crown films. Films like *Target for Tonight* or *Coastal Command* concentrated on the day to day routine, the organisational machinery of their subject. They were the typical official idea of propaganda, in which a thing like the close liaison of Admiralty and Coastal Command assumes a great importance and you have to show an Admiralty bloke popping out of his office every few minutes to visit Coastal Command, though he's got nothing to say when he gets there, just to prove to the public that they work closely together. The result is that these and similar films had a purely ephemeral how-the-wheels-go-round interest: to-day they're as dead as mutton. And what is worse, by concentrating on the organisation, they make propaganda only for bureaucracy. With a few small changes (such as different uniforms) they'd do equally well as German or Japanese propaganda—intrinsically they take sides no more than a Bren gun does. Now it is the great merit of *Fires Were Started* that it does take sides, that it is not afraid to come out with a confession of faith. Of course there is a certain amount (too much in fact) of people answering telephones, writing things on blackboards and moving little coloured discs about, but that's not what the film is really about; it's about men, how they live and how they die, how they work together on the job and how they live together off the job. And that will be just as interesting after the war is over as it is now.

The film is so good that it is a shame to have to pick holes; but it has bad faults, so let's get them over with. Writing of love, D. H. Lawrence made a savage attack on that solid old middle-class philosopher Benjamin Franklin for giving a lot of commonsense hints on how to "use venery". Lawrence's point, and he was perfectly right, was that love is a thing that exists on its own, has rights and duties of its own and is worthwhile for its own sake; it's debasing it to "use" it for some meagre middle-class end. In the same way Jennings has not been content to let the men and their job stand

for what they're worth; he's tried to tie up their heroism and their decency with the war effort in the shape of a munitions' ship leaving the dock safely next morning. Now there was not the least need to do that. Jennings did it before in *Heart of Britain* when he tried to sew up the cheerfulness and efficiency of the people we'd seen into a Whitley leaving to bomb Germany. It cannot be stated too firmly that people, their way of life and their qualities, can safely be left to stand on their own feet—they don't want this spurious veneer of war-time patriotism to provide their justification for existence. No doubt it was tenderness for official feelings that led Jennings to make so much of that munitions' ship, and also to make much of the fact that the A.F.S. was drawn from all classes, which is only a snivelling bureaucrat's point. But Jennings must be held entirely to blame for the three or four occasions when, with somebody playing the piano or reading or reciting poetry (in his worst *Words for Battle* manner) he goes all arty for a moment, then after a nervous glance at the embarrassed audience, his courage fails him and pretending that he didn't mean it really he proceeds to take the mike out of himself.

Real and alive

Never mind, these faults in the end do not detract from what is the real strength of the film—the best handling of people on and off the job that we've seen in any British film. In spite of a couple of middle-class sore-thumbs, Jennings has got together as real and alive a collection of people (Cockneys mainly) as you could meet with anywhere. Maybe for the first time we have proper working-class dialogue on the screen and dialogue that's really getting there and meaning something. At a guess, his success arises from keeping his people together for days on end, watching them like a lynx and listening to them like a mass-observer, and building up the dialogue by rehearsing them for hours on end. Anyway, whatever he did, he's certainly got the goods this time. There's a cheerful ex-taxi driver whose good humour is based on the fact that he's got his feet firmly fixed on the ground and nothing that happens can shake his absolute command of the job. There's a bald-topped humourist whose liveliness and practical joking are absolutely invincible. And there's a man whose wife keeps a paper shop, whose long mock-miserable face, ape-long arms, and forthright way of putting on his scarf and pushing off on his bike, are a complete embodiment of the rough warm strength of the Cockney. And there's half a dozen more, including a sub-officer whose way of going

on with his men is a perfect pattern of how to run a job.

Perhaps the nicest thing about the film is that it shows us for the first time how a job gets done in England. People who talk scathingly about the British workman and think that anyone having a backstretch is slacking, have no idea how heavy work gets done—if they do half-an-hour's digging they tear at the job and end with blistered hands. They don't understand the slow run-up, the odd and essential cup of tea, the backchat and horseplay which go to make up the rhythm of heavy work, without which it cannot be done properly. As we watch these firemen by day, doing their routine chores, chatting, whistling and tripping each other, or at night on the job running out the branches, finding water, getting on the roof, methodically (it would look slowly to the ignorant), with complete physical confidence and control over their job and with a discipline that comes only from the job itself, we know we're seeing on the screen for the first time a true picture of how the English, the best and quickest workers in the world, really set about doing a job. And from this film the A.F.S. with its loose semi-naval disciplinary set-up, seems (or rather seemed) an ideal way of organising an important service.

There are plenty of other nice things in the film. The men coming to work, one on his bike, one stopping to pat a horse and so on, the arrival of the newcomer under the quizical glances of the men in the yard and a bucket of water down his trousers to welcome him; the little touches of humour like the man and the dustbin, and perhaps, best of all, the morning after, with the tired, scorched, dirty men struggling to roll up the branches over piles of rubble and pools of water, their job nearly over for the moment, but only the prospect of a day cleaning up and another night of heat, dirt, wet and danger before them. As you watch this film, the certainty comes over you that it was just these men, running their job and their lives in just this way, who kept London from burning to the ground. And then you read of the new discipline that is being cooked up for the N.F.S., of polished buttons, belted and buttoned tunics and inspection before going on to the streets, and you read stories of the experienced commanders being replaced by "good disciplinarians", and you wonder if all this hi-de-hi discipline is going to be any good at putting the fires out. Anyway *Fires Were Started* is a fine and fruitful record of a way of living and doing a job that *did* work and of a discipline that came from the job itself, the only true discipline.

Technically the film is well photographed on the whole, the sets very good, the sound, except for one or two studio echoes, excellent, but the cutting a bit on the slapdash side. Its whole purpose is to get the men over; and that it does magnificently.

No. 12

THE COUNTRY MAID AND HER MILK CAN



A Country Maid was walking along with a can of milk upon her head, when she fell into the following train of reflections. "The money for which I shall sell this milk will enable me to increase my stock of eggs to three hundred. These eggs, allowing for what may prove addled, and what may be destroyed by vermin, will produce at least two hundred and fifty chickens. The chickens will be fit to carry to market just at the time when poultry is always dear so that by the new year I cannot fail of having money enough to purchase a new gown. Green—let me consider—yes, green becomes my complexion best, and green it shall be. In this dress I will go to the fair, where all the young fellows will strive to have me for a partner but no—I shall refuse every one of them, and with a disdainful toss turn from them." Transported with this idea, she could not forbear acting with her head the thought that thus passed in her mind when down came the can of milk, and all her imaginary happiness vanished in a moment.

REALIST FILM UNIT

47 OXFORD STREET, W.1

Telephone: GERRARD 1958

British Films Instruct New York Gardeners

The following is from a brochure issued in New York by the Museum of Modern Art.

NEW YORKERS who would like to spend a lunch hour or two learning how to dig, sow, plant, hedge, ditch, plough and furrow victory gardens will find very practical instruction on the subject at the Museum of Modern Art during the next two weeks. Since the outbreak of war in 1939 the United States has given large quantities of vegetable seeds to England, which now reciprocates by sending to this country ten short films which show in the most practical fashion how to get the maximum value from seeds and gardens, how to store vegetables for winter, in fact how to wage a victorious war with the weapon of food production.

Iris Barry, Curator of the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, says of the series:

"These are the best instructional films I have seen, well-made and entirely practical yet full of human interest. Members of the staff of the Museum—a surprising number of whom are ardent weekend gardeners themselves—were so enthusiastic at a special showing that there seemed no alternative but to make them available at once to our Museum visitors.

"Apart from their practical value, I suspect that the films will tend to draw American audiences into closer sympathy with the common man and woman of England, shown coping with the same problems that confront us today. One of the most refreshing qualities of these films is the absence of the so-called Oxford accent. The commentary is spoken by plain people with plain voices remarkably easy on the ear."

The films are as follows: *How to Dig, Hedging, Sowing and Planting, Storing Vegetables Indoors, Storing Vegetables Outdoors, More Eggs from your Hens, Ditching, A Way to Plough, Turn of the Furrow, Winter on the Farm.*

In the first group of films *How to Dig* will undoubtedly be for most New Yorkers an eye-opener on the unaccustomed subject of the proper use of a spade. The amount of footwork entailed in *Sowing and Planting* will be quite a revelation too. *More Eggs from Your Hens* goes beyond simple tips on utilizing every scrap of kitchen waste and provides personal appearances by several hard-working English backyard biddies.

The second group of films, on farming topics, makes clear what skill and economy lie at the root of England's handsome but sturdy hedges, and gives a forthright lesson on the right way to drain and ditch a field. Alarming calm and competent land-girls demonstrate efficient ploughing so that even a greenhorn can understand. Last and best of this group is *Winter on the Farm* in which an English farmer answers the question so often put by his city friends: "What do you do on the farm in winter-time?" His graphic facts and figures provide an unusually intimate and thought-provoking study of the economy and management of a typical small farm. The film also affords a strikingly beautiful glimpse of rural existence and of its problems, which prove to be much the same as for the comparable American farmer.

NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

Covering with Affection. Film Advisory Board, Bombay. *Producer:* Shantaram. *Director:* Bhaskar Rao. *Commentator:* A. F. Stalyarkhan. 11 mins.

Subject: Making blankets for Indian soldiers.

Treatment: It doesn't sound a likely subject, but it's a competent film. Covering blanket making, from sheep to soldier, the film manages to pack in a lot of good shots of Indian people and their background. Excellent exterior camera work and good editing (neither of which are mentioned on the credits) overcome the defects of the studio opening and the clever-clever commentary.

Propaganda value: Good. We hope to see many more films of this quality from India. Starting with last year's batch of films, such as *Changing Face of India* and *Made in India*, there seems to be a new spirit and vitality in Indian short film production.

Note: The film is to be re-commentated before being shown over here.

Debris Tunnelling. *Production:* Shell Film Unit. *Director:* Kay Mander. *Camera:* W. Suschitzky. *Producer:* Edgar Anstey. M.O.I. 19 mins.

Subject: How to get people from under the debris of bombed buildings by means of a tunnel.

Treatment: One must certainly hand it to the Shell Unit. Here is a subject that might well have baffled the toughest director. The process of tunnelling is long, repetitious and difficult to understand. Any technical mistake would be glaringly apparent to the specialised audiences for whom the film is intended and there was no place for any dramatic flourishes. But were Shell and Miss Mander daunted? Of course not. Nails are driven into wood, wood is driven into debris, processes are driven into the audience. I could build a tunnel, you could build a tunnel and I wouldn't be surprised if the Shell Film Unit didn't actually build one to see how it went. It's a nightmare film. Cold, dry and technical as it is, it borders on the edge of lunacy. The word *debris* covers a lot of things and tunnelling through it means perhaps working through a cupboard or a sideboard, it involves questions of what is in drawers because it is obviously more difficult to tunnel through a cupboard stuffed with tinned salmon than through one filled with evening dresses. You are not only tunnelling through bricks, but through the sudden broken strata of people's lives. Like entering a house through the gas oven or finding yourself in somebody else's bottom drawer.

But why do Shell persist in using amateur commentators? It's a nice idea of course, but the voice tends to be that of the Ancient Mariner instead of Scheherazade. It is better to be beguiled than buttonholed.

Propaganda value: Excellent instructional but they might have told us how long it takes to build a tunnel. One never knows when the knowledge might be good for one's morale.

Stooking and Stacking. *Production:* Realist Film Unit. *Director:* Rosanne Hunter. *Camera:* A. E. Jeakins. *Commentary:* Finlay Currie. M.O.I. 13 mins.

Subject: The importance of good stooking and stacking and the right way to do it.

Treatment: Ably following in the experienced

footsteps of Miss Thompson, Rosanne Hunter has turned out yet another of the excellent agricultural film series. The exposition is clear, the camera work excellent and the subject easily and unobtrusively well directed. Only once did there seem to be a lapse and that was when the commentator, in his rather wee bairn's voice, was talking of the importance of building the stocks up to the centre. To the ignorant critic it looked very definitely as though the men were doing the opposite and making a depression in the middle of the stack.

Propaganda value: The film should be invaluable in teaching new agricultural workers 'how to do it', and it will perhaps remind old hands of a thing or two they have forgotten.

Extract from *TIME*, March 15

At the Front in North Africa (U.S. Signal Corps—Warner) might be more appropriately entitled "Darryl Zanuck's War". A Technicolor panorama of the early stages of the North African invasion, it was filmed by 42nd Signal Corps photographers under Cinemaestro Zanuck's personal direction. It has all the Zanuck fingerprints: it is flamboyant, melodramatic, sometimes corny, sometimes hysterical—but never dull. A pretty picture, it never approaches the unvarnished realism of the best Nazi or Soviet war films.

The film covers the North African campaign comprehensively. It begins with a review of French and Arab soldiers who greeted the U.S. troops in Algiers, ends with a front line view of the first major contact of U.S. and German forces: a tank battle at Tebourba. There, from a hilltop that looks little more than a grenade-throw from the battlefield, the camera watches a group of Nazi tanks deployed in a small valley. German cannon, concealed in straw-thatched sheds fire at approaching U.S. tanks. Then U.S. artillery takes effect; the Nazi tanks turn tail (their tails are painted red to identify them for their own planes). As they crawl away, one Nazi tank is smacked by a direct hit, spins helplessly on its tracks.

But the film's most exciting shots are those of air battles. *At the Front* has some of the most detailed close-ups of attacking planes yet seen on the screen. It shows low-level enemy attacks so close that bombs can be seen falling from the bomb bays. Again and again enemy planes, machine guns spitting, dive head on at the camera. The camera shows the results: Allied trucks flaring up in brilliant orange and red flame, wounded soldiers being picked up, men milling in shock.

These shots and the sound effects are the best things in *At the Front*. But Zanuck, invincibly Hollywood-minded, tried to dress up the film with arty shots of tank treads, dawns, sunsets, and many another ill-placed frippery.

When *At the Front* reached U.S. cinema houses, Colonel Zanuck himself was not quite satisfied. Wrote he in his log: "I don't suppose our war scenes will look as savage or realistic as those we usually make on the back lot, but you can't have everything."

**Tunis Expedition* (Random House- \$2), to be published next month.

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

MONTHLY SIXPENCE

VOL. 4 NO. 4, 1943

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

stands for the use of film as a medium of propaganda and instruction in the interests of the people of Great Britain and the Empire and in the interests of common people all over the world.

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER is produced under the auspices of Film Centre, London, in association with American Film Center, New York.

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Owned and published by

FILM CENTRE LTD.
34 SOHO SQUARE LONDON

W.1 GERRARD 4253

Documentary Developments In America

by Donald Slesinger (from *National Board of Review Magazine*)

I REPRESENT a very minor branch of the motion picture industry. We have no Music Halls, no Clark Gables; and none of us was troubled by the President's \$25,000 salary limitation order. Our audiences create no traffic problem. And very few States bother to censor what we show. We can't even claim to be something new under the sun. Rather we are a throwback to first principles in the cinema, before actors were used; when the camera's chief function seemed to be to record, to testify—or as we like to say now, to document. You will see how really insignificant we are when I tell you that we used only some 20 million feet of film last year out of a billion and a half.

Yet there seems to be some glamour about our work. Not in the fan magazines—but among the technicians and creative artist in the industry. In the last year and a half, dozens of first-rate Hollywood workers have stopped in my office to wonder how they could get into documentary production. Sam Spewack came over to make documentaries for the Office of War Information Film Bureau; Frank Capra is doing it for the Army, John Ford for the Navy; Robert Riskin is doing it for our overseas programme; and Kenneth MacGowan has just completed a documentary sabbatical with the Co-ordinator of Inter-American affairs. There are countless others in the armed forces and in civilian branches of government. Some are in little organizations in New York, Chicago, Hollywood itself. And with all the irritation of small budgets, government red tape and sponsors they seem to be satisfied that what they are doing is important.

I use these famous names that have glamour for all of us, because the documentary film has glamour for them. Although some of them may one day be, they are not yet leaders in this new field. Standards are still being set by people that are relatively unknown—people like Willard Van Dyke, Henwar Rodakiewicz, Ralph Steiner—and soon once again (I hope) Pare Lorentz. Why is the documentary film and what is happening to it to-day so fascinating to so many?

Perhaps a glance at the audiences will give us a clue. I have said that it was small in comparison with the one that patronises the theatres. But it is composed of people who are earnestly using the film for new experience—new knowledge. Farmers will travel miles after work to a grange or village hall to learn about rural electrification or forest fire control; doctors come to study new techniques in medicine and surgery; school children hear something about the world they live in; adults study their jobs or their fellow men. Day after day, night after night, in small groups of 30 or 40, from 4 to 500 they gather wherever there is darkness, electricity and a few chairs. And they often stay after the lights go on to talk about what they have seen, discuss the problems presented—even occasionally vote to do something about it. Making a film for that kind of audience puts a man in almost personal contact with the people he is addressing. And their talk, though he may never hear it, is a

personal response. That is the first fascination of this field.

The second is its complete freedom of subject matter. We are not concerned with who will be entertained or who will be offended. We neither expect nor want a universal audience for every film. We are in the position of the writer or columnist who has something he wants to say—and a medium in which to say it. So our first preoccupation is with the world we live in—and we tell about the parts of that world we understand or love or hate. The film thus is a potent means whereby we may say what we think and feel to others on a direct personal basis. Of course we don't always think socially, or clearly. And often we fumble with our medium. But so do writers and talkers. We are no better than we are. We have no single philosophy or co-ordinated social aim any more than do radio broadcasters. Our common ground is a medium that is concrete, real, persuasive.

Those two fascinations have always existed. But there were problems outside of production that had to be solved before the documentary or fact film (and I use the term in a broad sense to include even training) could come into its own. Resources and drive were lacking and though we should like to say that we finally furnished both ourselves, the truth is that Hitler did it for us. For he created a world situation that made it imperative for our country to develop to the full all of our communication resources. The airplane and the non-theatrical film have jumped ahead 20 years under the terrific pressure of war.

Distribution has always been a knotty problem. Facilities existed all over the country, but they were completely unco-ordinated. Under the leadership of the Film Bureau of the Office of War Information a lot of loose ends are being drawn together to make a national non-theatrical set-up. To aid the Government, and to do their own pre- and post-war job more effectively, the State film libraries are building up a vast non-theatrical co-operative. According to recent reports these libraries, with the 20,000, mostly mobile, projectors available to them, reach a national audience of over 30 million people who look at films because they want something other than entertainment. The Army and Navy show films to millions for training and orientation. Other millions learn about our war effort and are trained in techniques of civilian defence by government films; still others are trained to do better jobs in industry. We have now reached a point where a civilian agency upon completion of a film immediately releases from 500 to 750 prints, and the prints are worked overtime.

We have learned too, that the film is a common basic language. The Germans used them to spread fear and hate. We are using them to develop a common understanding. And we are sending prints to the remote corners of the earth—China, India, Egypt, Australia, South America; prints of films that try earnestly and honestly to tell the world our right names. The war has made an esoteric journalism into a universal means of communication.

When the war ends we shall have developed

a system of world-wide communication through the documentary film. And in this country the main network will probably be in the hands of the non-profit film libraries. This network will make moderate cost production pay a moderate profit so that the field will gradually cease to depend upon government enterprise. The flexible mobile distribution will carry films to small towns and rural areas that do not now have theatres. This will, of course, be a challenge to the theatrical part of the motion picture industry to serve all levels of age, intelligence, economics and every point of view, instead of the mythical average it serves now. For if the theatrical motion picture industry doesn't, the non-theatrical motion picture industry will find ways of making production earn its way even if it appeals to only one section of the population.

There is no reason why the motion picture industry should not feel the same responsibility to all the public that the book publishing industry feels. Indeed, if it did it would bring into the theatres a vast audience that now scarcely ever attends.

I hope the theatrical section of the movie industry will take care of that problem. For, if I could, I should like to see us remain unambitious and even poor. We are teachers primarily and what we have to do is too important to turn aside from now, or after the war is over. When peace comes we shall share with other teachers using other media of communication the tremendous job of educating citizens of the post-war world. To do that we must concentrate on our problem, which is first—what to say—then to whom it must be said, and finally how it can best be said to many special audiences. And we must keep our medium free of both economic and governmental domination so that the best minds in the country will use it freely in the interest of the public good.

SIGHT and SOUND

SUMMER ISSUE

FILMS IN SWEDEN
A PLEA for D. W. GRIFFITH
CHILDREN'S CINEMA
EIRE

6d.

Published by: The British Film Institute,
4 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1.

STORY OF A RUSSIAN MOVIE MAN

Filming the Battle for Moscow

From the diary of Feodor Bunimovich

From the "American Cinematographer"

FOR many weeks now we have lived in a car, listening to the purring of its engine, occasionally verifying whether the spring and tyres are in good shape. There were three of us: cameraman Pavel Kasatkin, driver Pavel Shishko, and myself. We trust our old car despite several holes made by mine fragments, a twisted running board, smashed headlights, throbbing valves. There was not a single instance when she went back on us.

As if subject to the laws of mimicry, she has already changed her colouring three times. Originally black, she became a spotted green. Then, with the arrival of autumn, Shishko smeared her with mud and she became grey and quite invisible on dusty country roads or amid naked trees. When snow fell she changed into a white coat. Such are the requirements of camouflage.

After a two-hour ride we reach the first village where we stay for the night. In the morning we proceed into the thick of a forest where we find a well-equipped hospital. Dr. Merkulov, head of the surgical division, meets us with an apology, "I am sorry, but I cannot talk to you now. I haven't slept since yesterday and there is still a lot of work to do. Decide for yourselves what you want to film. . . ."

At headquarters we were told that a trench mortar battery commanded by Semenets had fired eighty projectiles during the day, destroying two enemy machine-gun nests, two dugouts and a large number of men. Semenets was somewhere in the front detecting the enemy's gun emplacements. The battery was silent. I informed the commander over the telephone that motion picture cameramen were visiting the battery.

"Wait a bit," he replied, "we will establish the enemy position in a moment and then we will be ready to welcome you."

A little while later the order came for the battery to open fire on two enemy fortifications. One shot was fired, which we filmed. Then the range was somewhat changed and a second shot fired. The man in charge of the battery told us, "That apparently was adjustment fire. In a moment we will probably open fire from the whole battery. Get ready. . . ."

We took up advantageous positions for filming and held the cameras in readiness. Ten minutes passed. . . . Fifteen minutes. . . . No order came to open fire. I again rang up the observation point. The reply was: "First two shots fired destroyed both enemy fortifications. There is no need for more fire."

An episode for a newsreel was thus quite abbreviated. It was a success scored for the mortarmen, but it left us nothing to boast of. . . .

The first time we met him was at the front line. I saw a Red Army man running from the side of the enemy. Now and then he fell, rose, crawled. He was not wounded—why then was he running from the battlefield?

Only when he got to the trenches and lay next to me I realised that he was a signalman.

He looked not more than twenty years of age. His big blue eyes were naïve and his smile shy. His face and hands were covered with clots of sticky mud. As he lay near me he tried to regain his breath as soon as possible, in order to continue on his way. My questions he answered in monosyllables and obviously unwillingly. Several days later, in conversation with Battalion Commissar Storozh I mentioned the signalman I had seen.

"Why, that must be Fedoseyev!" exclaimed Storozh, "he is a wonderful fighter, bold, resourceful, finds his bearings quickly in any situation and under any conditions. There were instances when Fedoseyev made his way toward a tank that had gone far ahead, climbed up from the rear toward the turret, knocked as had been previously arranged. The tank crew then transmitted through him all the necessary information. You and your friends will do the right thing filming him in action."

In Action

We managed to film Fedoseyev as he was taking a report from the front line. Shell explosions did not deter him. In the most dangerous spots he dropped down and crawled on. His face was all scratches, and on his brow—despite a cold, penetrating wind—were visible large drops of perspiration. We see him running across a field toward a country road, darting into the bushes where his motorcycle is hidden. He starts the machine. His report will be delivered on time. . . .

Carrying a white flag of truce a lieutenant of Yarokhin's brigade and an accompanying Red Army man crossed the front line. The lieutenant had a perfect command of German. Explaining to the German patrol that they were bearers of a truce flag, he asked to be taken to Colonel Neudind.

"You are surrounded," said the lieutenant, "to avoid unnecessary bloodshed the Red Army command urges you to surrender."

Indeed, Klin was then in an iron ring.

To the Germans, Klin was an important strategic point—it served as a forwarding centre for supplying the German army which had been assigned the task of enveloping Moscow. After losing 250 tanks, about 1,000 trucks, more than 100 medium and heavy guns and a great number of men, the Germany army was in retreat. However, the Germans disliked the idea of withdrawing from Klin. The negotiations brought no result and Soviet troops launched an assault.

Major General Chernyshev's troops attacked from the north, Colonel Lukhtikov's troops from the east and Major General Ivanov's mounted group from the south. Four days later Klin fell. Colonel Neudind fled westward, leaving over a thousand men killed.

We are now proceeding along this road. One or two miles from Klin we came across the first traces of the Germans' "planned" retreat. In ditches lie twelve cars with the

wheels turned upward, two heavy guns, one medium sized tank.

A car in front—judging by the scattered documents and maps, a staff car—was hit by a shell and blocked the road. The trucks following were stalled. Our artillery in the meantime had continued to shell the column. The frantic Germans threw into the ditches not only the smashed cars, but some that were in perfect working order. All strove to get clear of the fire and abandoned everything. One German soldier, stricken by a bullet, remained petrified in a running attitude.

As we proceeded further along the road we came across even larger numbers of dead German soldiers and abandoned cars, guns, tanks.

With difficulty we got as far as the village of Petrovskoye before nightfall. A vast field was covered with enemy machines. Kasatkin mounted one of them and filmed this amazing panorama from practically every angle. . . .

When we approached Klin our troops were entering the town. Automatic riflemen wearing white robes, cavalry, artillery, advanced past smashed and deserted German trucks and tanks, past demolished buildings, past numerous crosses with German helmets—frightful traces of the "victorious" retreat of the Germans.

We filmed the entry of the Red Army troops into Klin from the roof of our car. Then we proceeded toward Tchaikovsky's house where lived and worked the great composer. We found the gates smashed, the fence broken—apparently the place was used as a tank garage. Near the entrance lay a German motor-cycle and alongside it, scattered in the snow, were manuscripts and Tchaikovsky's broken bust. In the rooms where Tchaikovsky had created works of genius, the Germans repaired motor-cycles. The wall panels of Karelian birch were torn off, all wooden objects burned, stage models smashed.

"The German soldiers took a special fancy for a model of the ballet stage production, *Swan Lake*," explained the director of the museum, "they extracted all the figurines of danseuses and fought over the division."

Klin is practically burned to the ground. Before retreating the Germans blew up the bridge and even the town's new polyclinic. Near its iron fence we met a woman in tears—she was the polyclinic's head doctor.

Cakes for Red Army

The Klin inhabitants rejoiced and gave a rousing welcome to the Red Army, which brought them liberation. Everyone tried to express appreciation by bringing presents. When a truck with Red Army men halted near Tchaikovsky's house a woman brought out a big plate of cakes for the men. . . .

Artillery fire had somewhat subsided, the rumbling receding ever farther into the enemy's positions.

From the forest on the right our tanks appear, crushing trees as they rush forward. It is a tank regiment going into action—the regiment to which we knew our friend Gureyev has returned.

The tanks are followed by infantry. Groups of men are scattered all over the battlefield. Shouting, "Hurrah! For our country, for

(Russian Diary cont.)

Stalin!" men rise from the trenches and dash forward.

One minute ago these men were pressed close to the walls of the trenches, shrinking at the loud whining of shells. Now in a burst of enthusiasm they are rushing forward against the enemy, paying no attention to exploding mines all around. One commander shouts something, brandishing his revolver. Then he falls, apparently wounded in one leg, rises on the other and continues to shout, urging his men on. We, too, swept by the general enthusiasm, rise from the trenches and begin filming the engagement.

That day the enemy in our sector wavered and began to fall back. . . .

Shock troops of Major General Zakhvatiev were engaged in a battle for the village of Spasomazkino. We left our car in a deep ravine about a mile and a half from the village. The road toward the village was kept under strong fire. Very often we had to crawl and snow got into our felt boots, sheepskin coat sleeves and camera. The camera's mechanism was affected by frost and for each filming it was necessary, while lying in the snow, to warm it beneath the sheepskin. A battle was being fought on the outskirts of the village. Our men were vigorously dislodging German automatic riflemen from all shelters.

Near the school we beheld a terrible picture which we will never forget. Thrown together in a heap lay the dead bodies of old men, women and children. Some had legs and arms broken, others disfigured faces. All had been shot with automatic rifles. Somewhat aside lay embraced

an old peasant and a young woman with an infant in her arms. Why had those people been shot? The infant had apparently been wrapped in a kerchief or blanket. This the Germans had torn off, and the woman had pressed the naked body of her infant daughter to her own. Bullets had pierced the child's shoulder and breast, the blood was congealed in scarlet strips.

Our men, their automatic rifles still steaming, stopped near the dead and then silently, with lips compressed, proceeded to the place from which came the noise of rifle shots and reports of exploding hand grenades. Soon German resistance was broken and our troops, advancing in a long column, entered the village. . . .

Below I see black dots in motion. These are German soldiers scurrying in all directions.

I scarcely manage to turn aside somewhat before the gunner opens machine-gun fire upon the dispersing enemy infantry and machines. Then discerning something in a side window, he goes up toward a machine-gun and opens fire. "A fascist plane," I say to myself. Two of our pursuit planes pass above us, heading straight for the enemy. As if racing they keep overtaking each other. I prepare the camera for filming.

A bright sun shines straight into the cockpit. It has dispelled the mist and several rays are on the gunner's smiling face. The plane flies smoothly, confidently. We pass over enemy positions. Below we see several explosions of anti-aircraft shells. The Germans apparently collected their wits and decided to ambush us on the way back.

For three days after that we filmed the life of fighting fliers. . . . We motion-picture cameramen flew in two separate planes.

Each of us took up a position in the rear of

the cockpit of the dive bombers along with the gunner and wireless operator. Each man's position and turn were figured out beforehand so that we could do our work and not be in the way of the gunner. Over us flew pursuit planes guarding the heavier machines.

Two enemy planes, Junkers 88's, appear in front of us. They avoid an engagement. I descend to the lower hatch where I squeeze alongside the machine-gun. The pose is rather unusual: feet resting on the seat above and head below, pressing against the machine-gun. Eyes water, there is a rush of blood to the head.

A long ribbon road cuts the snowy waste. There are black dots on the road—tanks and lorries. Somewhat farther away we discern a river crossing.

Bombs are released from the plane. Many bombs. They drop with a rush, and in a few seconds flashes of explosions appear along tank and infantry columns. One bomb hits a crossing. Soon fires burst out. The fascist lorries and tanks are burning. I grip the camera and film in a sort of frenzy, overcome with the hatred I feel for the enemies of my country.

Our plane climbs a bit, makes a turn and then dives. A noiseless drop along the incline, accompanied by the howling of a wind which within a fraction of a second swells into a roar. I can hardly catch my breath and my eyes smart. An invisible force pins me to the board and seems to be breaking my body. Then the plane straightens out. . . .

Book Review

MAN AND BOY. By Sir Stephen Tallents. *Faber & Faber*. 21s.

Those who have read *The Projection of Britain* will confidently expect good prose in this book; those who have worked with its author will expect a good deal of brisk and energetic action in which the rapier rather than the singletick is the symbolic weapon. Neither will be disappointed.

Many documentary workers—aware perhaps only of Tallents' inspired pioneering at the E.M.B. and of his determined championship, against much opposition and more incomprehension, of the documentary film movement, will be duly astonished to read, in this autobiography of his earlier life, that he served in the Irish Guards and was wounded in France 1915; that he subsequently organised Britain's first food rationing scheme, in the company of such diverse people as Beveridge and Walter de la Mare; and that he was the key representative of the Allies during the confused post-war period in the newly formed Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and was governor of Riga at a time when Bolsheviks, Latvians and Germans were fighting each other with grim but lunatic determination. In addition there is an admirable picture of Tallents' childhood and education which has a curious sense of universality about some of its memories; for he has hit on the type of childhood episodes common to all.

The book ends in 1919. We shall therefore, look forward with an interest which much exceeds any local trepidation, to a second volume, which will bring fully into contemporary perspective the further activities of a man whose abilities have been only too frequently miscalculated or misprized by lesser men who depend on their entrenching tools and have forgotten the horizon.

★ For your information

IN every progressive enterprise there must be leaders and those who follow behind. As artistic and technical progress in cinematography quickens to the tempo and stimulus of war, "KINEMATOGRAPH WEEKLY" is always to be found "up-with-the-leaders", its well-informed pages radiating perception and far-sighted thinking. Kinematography's leaders themselves know this for truth and turn to "K.W." week by week for information and enlightenment.

KINEMATOGRAPH WEEKLY



93 LONG ACRE
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SCIENTIFIC FILMS IN WAR-TIME

INTERCHANGE of expert technical information is one of the permanent and important foundations of international unity. "Shop" is the one universal language; and the hieroglyphics of the mathematician, the biologist, the chemist, and even today the philosopher, are more equally intelligible than all the Volapuks and Esperantos. Nowhere, however, is this *lingua franca* of the specialist better illustrated than in the visual terms of the motion picture. The movies can be as valid for the footballer as for the surgeon, for the philatelist as for the physicist.

In war-time there are a thousand and one points of scientific and technical importance which must be quickly and efficiently interchanged between the various United Nations; and in many cases one nation will have special war experiences of its own, the detailing of which to others is of enormous practical value. A.R.P. measures, rationing and nutrition are random examples. But now especially important are the fields of scientific research and discovery, whether in the laboratory or on the battlefield. New techniques, for instance, in the treatment of wounds under arctic or tropical conditions can be quickly and accurately disseminated, with the help of films. Thus what was discovered by grim experiences in Russia may be quickly transmitted to surgeons in Alaska; and the sufferings of men alleviated more quickly in the Pacific islands thanks to a visual exposition of methods developed in the African desert.

Examples could be multiplied almost indefinitely. What is more important is to realise that such films have a moral as well as a practical value, and may be regarded by each producing country as being first class propaganda—often in a sense far wider than that contained in their original terms of reference.

In fact such films are in many ways the perfect example of information and morale-propaganda combined.

Somewhat belatedly, but none the less very sensibly, more and more attention is now being paid to the development of this line of film work in Britain. There is much we can give the world in many varied fields, and it is good to learn that a number of subjects are now in production (or already completed)—some of them of direct use in training or instruction, others detailing experiments or new techniques for the benefit of the skilled experts.

Based as they are on the vital needs of a nation mobilised for war, these scientific films should represent excellent value for money expended, even in the eyes of the Treasury. A glance at the Soviet scientific films which are now in this country is sufficient to prove that scientific validity here goes hand in hand with good propaganda. For instance, the justly famous film of the resuscitation of a dog is first-class Soviet propaganda—and it is a solemn thought that we might well have made the same film ourselves in this country—but didn't.

There is indeed much we can learn from Russia in this matter. One of the most significant facts is that not merely specialist personnel but also specialist studios and equipment are available for the making of scientific films. So it should be in Britain too, if this country, as it should, is to give a strong international lead to the use of films in relation to science.

It is not too soon to formulate the structure of an international organisation for the post-war world; but in order to do this immediate national action must first be taken. The activities of Government Departments, commercial sponsors and other organisations need co-ordination—a job which might well be undertaken by the Association of Scientific Workers in some form of liaison with the Ministry of Information. There is much to be done, and the sooner a start is made the better.

A conference has been called by the Scientific Films Committee of the Association of Scientific Workers to discuss the possibility of setting up an English Scientific Films Association. Such a body would clearly be of great value in the field of work indicated in these notes and we hope to publish a full report of the conference in our next issue.

Book Review

FILMS FOR THE COMMUNITY IN WARTIME. By Mary Losey. Published by National Board of Review in U.S.A. Price 50c.

Mary Losey has written a lively and imaginative guide to the war-time use of the film under the title of *Films for the Community in War-time*. It is intended for U.S. readers but contains many practical hints on programme selection and methods of presentation which will be of interest and value to anyone in this country who is concerned with propaganda or the use of the film for public instruction. The bulk of the book consists of recommended film programmes each designed to achieve a specific purpose. There are programmes of documentaries which will explain to the people of the United States the mind and face of their Allies in Great Britain, U.S.S.R., China, Canada, etc.; there are programmes to explain "Global Warfare", "Total Warfare", "The Nature of Life in the Armed Forces," and so on. British documentaries are featured generously and the book includes a synopsis of every film mentioned. The programme chosen to explain Great Britain to our American Allies is of particular interest. It consists of *Listen to Britain*, *Citizens' Army*, *Winter on the Farm*, *War-time Factory*, and *Newspaper Train*. This programme is described as a 60-minute *Guide to Britain*. Miss Losey has necessarily selected her programmes from those films available in the United States at the time of writing.

The book includes chapters on various functions of the film including such headings as "Instruction", "Persuasion or Morale Building" and "Information and Exhortation". It has something to say about the mechanics of projection and there are excellent hints on good non-theatrical showmanship. Miss Losey makes clear her purpose in writing the book in her opening paragraphs:—

"Films can help to win the war, if we use them intelligently. In this pamphlet we shall be talking about the use of films for fuller participation in the war effort by civilian adult and young people's groups—by schools, libraries, Y's, churches, motion picture councils, forums, civilian defense councils, service clubs, social agencies, trade unions, women's clubs.

"The first idea which embraces all others is the fact of our involvement in a violent world war. A war of such enormity that none of us can fully understand or be fully informed. Only by exchanging the fragments of knowledge of the worker, farmer, soldier, teacher, doctor, industrialist, grocer, geographer, housewife, sailor and all the other specialists you can mention, will we begin to put together the scattered parts of the puzzle and see the war as a whole. And when we see its wholeness involving the lives and the futures of all the people in the world we will begin to understand it."

Correspondence

DEAR SIR,

You may be interested in the enclosed copy of my report to my Executive Committee on a Course on the Film given to local units under the Army Education scheme.

Report on Course "The Film Then and Now"

This course was initiated as the result of casual shows under the category "Entertainment" to several local army units. I felt that something more in the nature of a connected series of shows would be well received and I discussed this with the Army Education authorities. Two local Education Officers agreed to take the course: the one to three units, the other to two. The Regional Committee for Education in H.M. Forces gave authorisation for transport and paid the lecturer's fee towards the cost of film hire.

The plan I had in mind was to begin with historical material—the film to 1914, the growth of the cartoon, the documentary film, the films of Chaplin and after accustoming the audiences to this (for them) new technique of talking about films, pass on to films grouped to illustrate subjects. This will be seen in the programmes listed below.

Much space could be given to the incidents of projection from snowy sites to country houses, on all sorts of current supplies and to the most fluctuating audiences: commonplaces of Army Education. More interesting was the reception: no one believed that this was education, the general belief being that we had pulled one over the authorities and that it was all entertainment disguised. I think the only thing which did anything to help this myth was a very restless show of *Last Laugh* in which I was certainly not the least bored person in the room.

My forecasts of reception were often upset: the early cinema material got a poor reception and *Film and Reality* failed to arouse the enthusiasm I had myself (this may have been a failure of mine); *Femme du Boulanger* went over well, although I was nervous of it; *Thunder over Mexico* was liked; but the biggest applause of all the course was given to a film which started off with all the disadvantages of being German, sung in a foreign language and needing a plot outline beforehand—Lotte Reiniger's *Papageno*.

Foreign films did not seem to be too much of an obstacle and the only person who objected to our showing German films was a W.V.S. driver.

The course is to be repeated this term to an R.A.F. audience and to a civilian class here.

M. W. BERESFORD,
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(A Community Centre for Adult Education)

A LETTER TO DOCUMENTARY

from Arthur Elton

Two things were recently delivered to the M.O.I.—the February issue of *D.N.L.* and a training film called *Debris Tunnelling*, useful not only at home, but in every English-speaking country. The February issue contained a leading article "based on material supplied by several correspondents in the United States" which states: "... our method of presentation [of films to the U.S.A.] is usually wrong. Much of our vernacular is unintelligible to U.S. audiences; some of our accents sound sissy and irritating to them." *Debris Tunnelling* had a commentary spoken in a West Country dialect. Since the producer of *Debris Tunnelling* is a member of the Editorial Board, I must assume that he does not support the leading article in his own paper. Or may I hope that he suffered a twinge of conscience before the paper went to bed?

Another member of the Editorial Board manages one of the best documentary units in the country. Their films are sensitive and human. Yet this unit has made itself master of the mumble, and has argued from time to time that the Empire and the United States should be made to understand our lingo, and that we should not translate ourselves for our Allies. I hope that this member of the Board also had a twinge of conscience, and that he now supports the views of your correspondents. One or two of this Unit's films, by the way, will not only be incomprehensible in the United States and the Em-

pire, but difficult to follow in many parts of Great Britain as well. Last year they made what I believe to be, with *Nine Men*, one of the best documentary films that has yet been produced. I mean *The Harvest Shall Come*. This film was taken over by the Ministry of Information and shown widely. The reports of its success were unanimous. So were the reports that many audiences could not easily follow the speech. The film was played by actors, but they spoke in a stagey Suffolk dialect. Fortunately, the virtues of the film overcame the handicaps, and triumphed over its obscurity.

The article goes on: "Our tempo is too slow for what they (the Americans) believe to be their hustling way of life. As a result our films lack speed, punch, attack and news value—all of which are marketable commodities in the U.S.A." This criticism is valid—and only the editors of *D.N.L.* and their colleagues can put it right. If themes and subjects are wrong, that is the fault of Films Division. But if technical treatment is wrong, that is the fault of the makers.

Hitherto documentary has turned to natural types because they are "real" and convincing; and because the audiences reached have been, on the whole, relatively small, sympathetic and ready to meet documentary halfway. To-day things are different. If, for example, a film is to be made about Joint Production Committees, better the whole world should get the message from ham

actors, than only half the world the message from the managers and workers themselves. I watch both with respect and dismay valiant efforts to turn our neighbours into actors. I am respectful because I know the difficulties which a director of natural types, such as Humphrey Jennings, often so brilliantly overcomes. I am dismayed because I think that this path can end in a brick wall.

Not that I suggest the jettisoning the use of people as people, but only that, if people cannot be persuaded to act or to speak clearly so that everyone can understand, then it is better to use good actors than to turn ordinary people into bad actors. In short, what documentary needs, and what it is slowly—too slowly—finding, is a school of documentary acting which will allow it to take advantage of the technique of the studio and everything which goes with it.

I believe that documentary will solve the problem because it has kept its vitality and strength. But the question which to-day still faces every documentary director has yet to be decisively answered. Is documentary going to build on the substantial foundations it has laid over the last fifteen years? Or is it going to hand over its technical achievements to the fiction school of films, allowing documentary technique to become separated from the basic ideas which created them.

ARTHUR ELTON
(Films Division, M.O.I.)

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Stock Rationing and Film Trailers

Following upon the note in our last issue on stock rationing, film trailers and Mr. Paul Kimberley's National Screen Service, a reader has sent us the following extract from "Tatler's" page in *The Daily Film Renter* of February 22nd:

"One thing that has afforded me some considerable amusement is that, when I was in Liverpool the other week, I wondered why—and that applied to quite a few other people—Paul Kimberley happened to be up in the Merseyside city at that particular juncture. It seemed to be almost more than a coincidence. Here were the trailers being discussed at General Council, and lo and behold! Paul makes a dramatic appearance, although I should have thought his duties as Director of Army Kinematography would have made his journey quite impossible.

Trailers were considered and, in response to the urgings of many delegates that they ought automatically to be thrown out, they had a stalwart defender in Fuller. Paul loomed large at the luncheon, even being called upon to make a speech—and I still couldn't understand—nor could quite a lot of other people. When I tackled the worthy General Secretary on it a day or two back, I was blandly informed Paul was feeling tired and came to Liverpool for a couple of days change.

Well, that's the official explanation. Personally, I shouldn't have thought the air of the Merseyside city was so terribly invigorating. But the hospitality definitely was. In any event, perhaps he was stimulated by the resultant defence of trailers, and, so far from them being out, I find them more in than ever, because the rumour goes that in future those companies who were making their own—namely, Metro, Paramount and Warner's—may in future do them through National Screen—so probably the journey was invigorating? It would appear so!"

Film Societies

At the Academy Cinema in Oxford Street, the London Scientific Film Society gave film shows in the winter of 1938 and again in 1939. The average audience was 300-400 people, and two typical films shown were *Rain and its Causes* and *How the Telephone Works*. Both are good examples of film being used to bring alive real facts about the world to the layman. They showed also that these scientific facts are not a jumble of abstruse theories and complicated formulae; on the contrary, the scientific film presents the inexplicable and the complex as a lucid pattern of thought. This is an important aspect of the social relations of science. Why?

Science has built up its structure, and so achieved its power of moulding our environment to suit our needs, very largely by *abstracting* itself from everyday human affairs. But the next step—implementing the promise of that power—involves stepping off the pedestal of abstraction into the commonplaces of men's day-to-day lives. Every time somebody, by talks, books, radio or films, makes the complex appear lucid—by showing how the radio valve works, how chromosomes affect our lives, how a bomb explodes—he does something which gives men a greater faith in objective, accurate thinking. That

is why lucid exposition is important in developing the social relations of science. The good scientific film can achieve this lucidity more easily and strikingly than can any other method.

A moving picture is seen on the cinema screen. The words of a commentary or dialogue inform about it. They develop the idea and make an abstract generalisation—a thing which does not come happily to the ordinary man, for it nearly always means removing the familiar emotional values. But the film steps in with the visual interpretation of the abstraction—a diagram, a chart, a photomicrograph—and the difficult thought process is helped on. Then the abstraction can be succeeded by a familiar object which may be relevant to it—a man, a house, a child, a doctor. The impersonal, and thus unlikeable quality, of the abstraction is torn away. Its likeable, rational quality remains. The idea that objective thinking must be cold and inhuman loses just a little more ground as the film winds into the take up box.

The Hayes Scientific Film Society was formed during March following a successful series of film shows run by the local Branch of the Association of Scientific Workers. There is a very encouraging critical interest in scientific films in the district, but as yet it only comes from the technical workers. One of the aims of this Society is to endeavour, through the Shop Stewards and Trades Council, to draw in work-people from the various factories; to get them to say what sort of shows they want, criticise them when they see them, and hence say what films they think should be made. It is realised, for example, that although radio is one of the major local industries, there is scarcely a worthwhile film on the subject, either of general interest or suitable for the training of assistants. It is felt that an organisation such as this Society should not be just a passive body, but that it should be a channel for constructive thinking and doing about scientific films.



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